

One Hand does not Applaud

A research on partnerships to achieve goals
between Syrian and Dutch organizations in The
Netherlands

Bachelor's Project 2019-2020

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Summary

Since the conflict in Syria, the Syrian diaspora in The Netherlands has seen a significant increase. In this growing community of Syrians, organizations started to sprout. These diaspora organizations' aims differ, but for all, organizing in a new country, within a new community and culture, brings a lot of challenges. That is why these Syrian diaspora organizations seek to partner up with Dutch organizations to improve their activities and ultimately achieve their goals.

By having conversations with these diaspora organizations and their partners, this research tries to find out how Syrian diaspora organizations and their Dutch partner organizations build successful partnerships to increase the capacity to achieve their goals. The literature on this topic shows that diaspora organizations can have different reasons for existence. In the case of the Syrian organizations, two major types can be identified. One of the types is the organization with a focus on better integration for the Syrian community, the other being an organization with its emphasis on providing aid to victims still in Syria and surrounding countries. Regardless of the goals of an organization, general factors for a successful partnership can be defined.

This research shows that institutionalization and patronization have a direct negative influence on the success of such partnerships. On the positive side, transparency and trust are highly valuable when engaging in partnerships with diaspora organizations. By conducting in-depth interviews, this research found that most of these factors have a positive and negative effect they are predicted to have. The exception is institutionalization, which appeared to be completely absent in all partnerships. Next to confirming the factors proposed by the literature, new factors are brought to attention. For the Syrian conflict, specifically, the political alignment of organizations is a real barrier to a successful partnership. Another unique factor, in this case, is the cultural attributes Syrians have. Due to the closed-off state of Syria, it takes more energy from both the Syrian community and its partners to build an open and successful partnership.

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Introduction

In the past eight years, the ongoing conflict in Syria has internationally displaced 6.7 million Syrians (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland, 2019). The diaspora present in The Netherlands amounts to over 90.000 first- and second-generation ethnic Syrians (CBS, 2018). According to Van Hear et al. (2004), diasporic individuals are, depending on personal stakes in their country of origin and their current home country, incentivized to participate in diasporic philanthropy in their country of origin. Next to this diasporic philanthropy, diasporas form communities of their own in their country of residence to support and develop the community in their country of residence (Mohan, 2002). He also states that these formed communities engage in philanthropy to positively influence the homeland.

When relocated to another country, refugees tend to form communities with other people of their own culture, taking form as refugee community organizations or diaspora organizations (Brinkerhoff, 2011; Flanigan, 2016; Van Hear, 2004; De Haas, 2006; Johnson, 2007). As De Haas (2006) put it, a diaspora organization is: “an organization consisting mainly of migrants and their descendants, irrespective of the specific activities of such organizations.” These organizations are, according to De Haas (2006), spontaneously created endeavors building on a network of multiple immigrants.

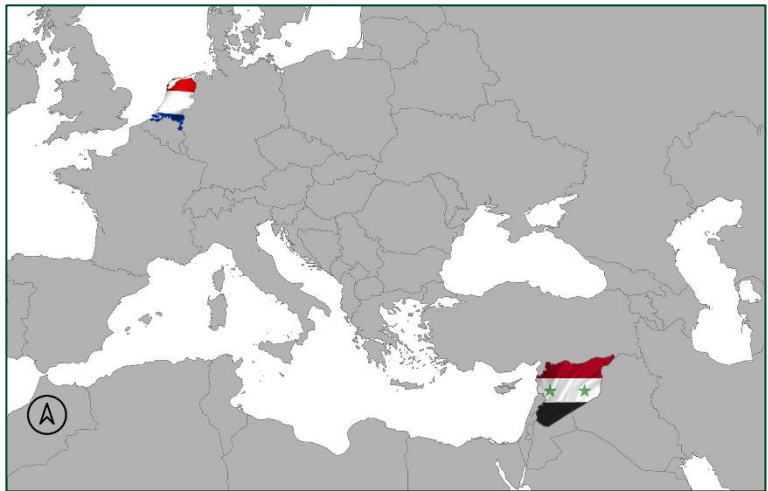


Figure 1: Map of relative location Syria and The Netherlands

Generally, the scope of diaspora organizations tends to focus on the integration of migrants in their country of residence (De Haas, 2004), in this case, The Netherlands. Hack-Polay (2008) argues that partnership between diaspora organizations and country of residence organizations creates a cultural exchange that is very impactful on the integration of the members of the diaspora organizations. Not only are these organizations of importance for integration, but the social mobilization of migrant groups and their participation in civil society is also stimulated by these diaspora organizations (Odmalm, 2004).

Integration is a priority for most of the Syrian migrants in The Netherlands, but another big issue for Syrian migrants is isolation and loneliness (Van Vliet, 2017). These two major issues are the main reason of existence for most of the Syrian organizations in The Netherlands. With the multifaceted conflict in Syria still going on, a peaceful future is not yet within reach. Because of this, the need for active diaspora organizations in The Netherlands is more crucial than ever. Their role in the Syrian community in The Netherlands and the aid they offer to vulnerable people back in Syria is essential for the future of their home country.

This research looks at the relations between Syrian diaspora organizations (associations, action groups, churches, and other collectives) and the Dutch organizations they cooperate with. The current situation in The Netherlands is one of the young Syrian diaspora organizations, most only being less than six years old. Most of these organizations have been set up by second-wave Syrian immigrants dislocated by the current conflicts (Stichting Syrische Vrouwen in Nederland, 2019; Het Syrisch Comité, 2019; Goed Samenleven Limburg, 2019). These organizations focus on two objectives: providing direct aid to people in Syria or helping other migrants

integrate into Dutch society. The provision of direct aid takes forms of, for example, sending products directly to Syria, mobilizing Syrian migrants in The Netherlands to do so, and generating awareness about the conflict in Syria (Het Syrisch Comité, 2019). The organizations that focus on integration take on issues like identity, language, and culture from both sides: Dutch and Syrian (Stichting Syrisch Vrouwen in Nederland, 2019; Goed Samenleven Limburg, 2019).

The partnerships the diaspora organizations engage in also differ based on their objectives. For organizations to provide aid to victims in Syria, they seek partnerships with internationally oriented organizations with experience in delivering humanitarian aid (PAX Nederland, 2019; Amnesty International, 2019; Het Syrisch Comité, 2019). The other organizations, focussing on integration, look for a more inward approach. They look for partnerships with local municipalities, small local non-profit organizations, and schools, for example (Stichting Syrische Vrouwen in Nederland, 2019; RTV Drenthe, 2019).

Because of the relative youth and inexperience of Syrian diaspora organizations, they need to seek partnerships with other organizations to improve their ability to achieve their goals (De Haas, 2006). The problem here is, because of their youth and inexperience, they are easily exploited and used for another organization's gain (Brinkerhoff, 2011; De Haas, 2006; Abdel-Samad & Flanigan, 2018).

Research Questions

To understand how exploitation can be avoided and the diaspora organizations can build successful partnerships, this research asks the following question:

- *“How can Syrian diaspora organizations build successful partnerships with Dutch organizations to achieve their goals?”*

To answer this main question, this research must dive into the main characteristics of such a partnership. This will be reviewed in available literature, seeking to answer:

- *“Why do diaspora organizations exist and why do they do they seek to build partnerships with other organizations?”*

After this, the research applies the literature findings to the case of Syrian diaspora organizations in The Netherlands, working together with Dutch partners. Seeking to answer the two following questions:

- *“How are Syrian diaspora organizations currently active in the Netherlands and what are their relations with Dutch organizations?”*
- *“How do Syrian and Dutch organizations improve and maintain their partnerships?”*

Altogether, the sub questions will provide both a framework and cases to help answer the main research question.

Research Structure

The design of this research is based on the design cycle, as described by Hennink et al. (2011). The next chapter will discuss the literature on the subject, brought together in a framework, and a conceptual model to visualize it. The third chapter concerns the methodological approach of this research, after which the results found in the field are described and analyzed. The last section draws conclusions based on the results.

Theoretical Framework

Types of diaspora philanthropy

According to Scheffer (1986), the definition of a diaspora is "ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homelands." Werbner (2002) adds to this that diasporas are communities that ascended the concept of territories and shared a collective destiny disregarding their geographical locations. These diasporas have a keen interest in practicing diaspora philanthropy, which defines as money, goods, volunteer labor, knowledge, skills, and other assets donated to influence their community positively (Flanigan, 2016). In the international context, diaspora philanthropy is regarded as having a competitive advantage over broader global communities providing aid. Diasporas have a stronger reach and can get to places other international philanthropic communities cannot. Next to that, diasporas may have more effective implementation mechanisms which only work in their country of origin (Brinkerhoff, 2014; Brinkerhoff, 2011). The statement a diaspora's reach is also true for communities in countries of residence, in this case The Netherlands. According to Odmalm (2004), trust and credibility is greater within those communities, compared to trust and credibility towards other communities. This indicates the importance of such diaspora communities towards integration into the country of residence's civil society.

Drivers of this diaspora philanthropy can be allocated to several factors. Influence from a cultural standpoint takes form in identity expression and belonging to their country of origin (Flanigan, 2016). Flanigan (2016) also states that maintaining cultural identity, as well as belonging, are drives for philanthropy in their community in the country of residence. In some cultures, there might even be a cultural obligation to engage in diaspora philanthropy (Brinkerhoff, 2011). Van Hear et al. (2004) adds a political factor to the mix. Philanthropy can have a political background in the form of promoting a particular political view, or a form of protest against a conflicting political view.

A point of attention, according to Van Hear et al. (2004), is that diasporas can be highly heterogeneous. These internal coherence problems might complicate efficient cooperation with other organizations. This heterogeneity does, however, create a check for the concerns about social equity. Bains (2014) finds that, because diaspora philanthropy is still mainly based on family ties, there is no guarantee that the donations will be distributed equally. As a collective, however, this inequality within a diaspora can be accounted for (Flanigan, 2016).

Factors for a successful partnership

To understand the factors that make a partnership successful, it is essential to first define when a partnership is successful. In the case of the Syrian diaspora organizations in The Netherlands, success depends on their own goals. The Syrian organizations in The Netherlands find themselves in two types of diaspora organizations. Those who focus on integration and social wellbeing of their community, and those who focus on providing humanitarian aid to Syrians in conflict areas (Stichting Syrische Vrouwen in Nederland, 2019; Het Syrisch Comité, 2019; Goed Samenleven Limburg, 2019; UOSSM, 2019).

Success for both types of diaspora organizations is in achieving their goals. When they make such a goal through cooperation with another organization, we can speak of a successful partnership. Studies on cooperation between diaspora organizations, on the one hand, and governments and development agencies, on the other

hand, show points of attention when engaging in collaboration. In her study on partnerships between diaspora organizations and the development industry, Brinkerhoff (2011) is quick to point to the concept of institutionalization. She describes this process as the transformation of a diaspora organization from a partner in development, to a tool of a bigger development actor to achieve its goal, at the expense of the diaspora organization. The problem here is the perception of these organizations as token public relations, rather than an equal partner. De Haas (2006) elaborates on the idea of diaspora organizations being an equal partner; he argues that recognizing the added value of a diasporic organization and letting them have a real and meaningful role in development projects and policy formulation is a recipe for a successful partnership. De Haas (2006) also warns that the diaspora organizations are not to be taught how to do development the right way, as they have practiced their philanthropy successfully for many years. This patronization is harmful to a good relationship and should be avoided to build a successful partnership.

Brinkerhoff (2011) also makes a note of institutionalization hurting the organizational identity of a diaspora organization. The organizational identity refers to the organization's mission, values, and identified constituencies to which it is accountable and responsive (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Due to institutionalization and patronization, organizational identity will experience pressure (Brinkerhoff, 2011). To protect one's organizational identity, it must have clearly articulated goals, values, and constituencies. De Haas (2007) goes even further by stating that patronizing the diaspora is fatal for building a partnership. Manaseryan (2004) agrees with this standpoint and adds that a patronizing attitude towards diasporas creates mistrust and disregard towards the other.

A second main criterium for a successful partnership is clear accountability. According to Romzek et al. (2013), accountability has two sides: formal and informal. Formal accountability is supported by the openness of financial and secretarial reports, regardless of personal contact. The formal side of accountability is best stimulated through transparency (Romzek & Dubnick, 1987). Being transparent about financial flows and general activities is valuable for formal accountability. While Cullen et al. (2000) propose a gradual reveal of financial and secretarial reports towards the partner organization, De Haas (2007) argues that trust comes from a completely transparent relationship and that holding back information might damage the partnership. Transparency, in this case, is thus an asset for a successful partnership.

On the other side of the coin, there is informal accountability. Romzek (2013) describe informal accountability as the cement that holds together the agreements made in a formal setting. Syrian diaspora organizations make use of mechanisms supporting informal accountability like social networks, reputation, and trust (Abdel-Samad & Flanigan, 2018). In the case of the Syrian diaspora organizations in The Netherlands, this research will mainly focus on one primary informal accountability mechanism: trust.

Trust brings us back to Cullen et al. (2000), who stated that the informal accountability mechanisms are just as important as the formal accountability mechanisms. About diaspora organizations, Cullen et al. (2000) suggest cross-cultural sensitivity on both sides to increase trust. Pucik (1988) stated before that a competent cross-cultural partner is more likely to have success. De Haas (2007) argues that trust from diaspora organizations, in general, comes with a long-term commitment. Making durable agreements and keeping to those, over time, builds a bond of trust.

Conceptual model

In review of the literature, the following concepts seem to be the most important influences on a successful partnership: institutionalization, patronization, formal accountability, and informal accountability. These four factors have both negative and positive effects on a successful partnership and, ultimately, in achieving the organizational goals. The model below shows the interactions the above-stated factors have on partnerships and goal achievement.

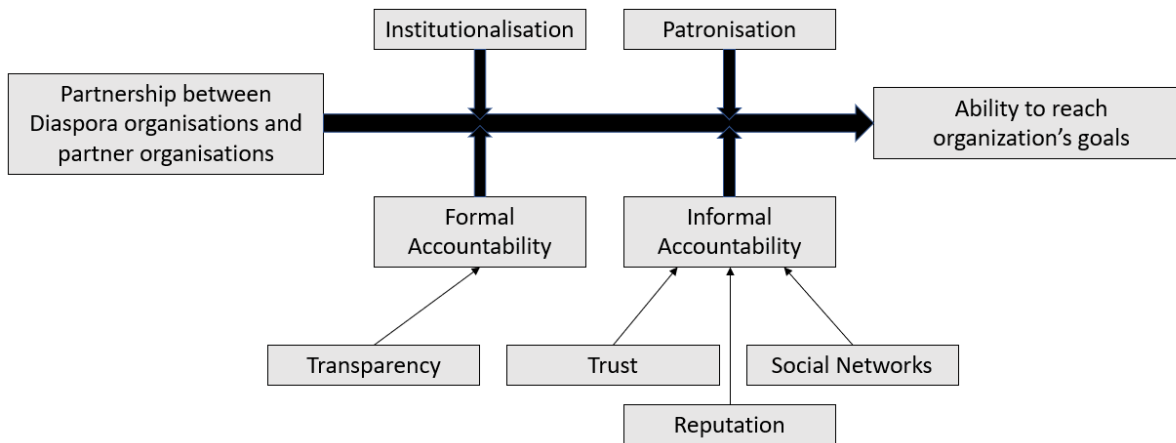


Figure 2: Conceptual model

Methodology

The main tools for data collection in this research are literature studies and in-depth interviews. The concepts and theories found in the literature study are applied to seven cases in The Netherlands. Through in-depth interviews, this research aims to find out what influences these forms of cooperation in negative or positive ways. By testing factors found in the literature studies and discovering new insights through the interviews, this research finds a complete answer to the main research question.

In the appendix, an interview guide is included to set up guidelines for the in-depth, semi-structured interviews which will be conducted for this research. Each central question comes with several secondary and probing questions to find out as much as possible about both Syrian diaspora organizations and Dutch civil society organizations cooperating with them.

All interviews will be semi-structured, using guidelines set by Clifford et al. (2010) and Hennink et al. (2011). The main reason for using semi-structured interviews is to open the possibility to bring up other factors for a successful partnership not mentioned in the literature studies. The goal of these interviews is not only to check the influence of the literature-found factors on the organizations but also to find new effects on the success of a partnership.

For a semi-structured interview, it is not possible to set up a very strict guide on how the conversation will fold out, that is why this research uses a set of central and secondary questions to guide the interview conversation. Interviews will start with factual topics like the history of an organization, or how it functions. After that is clear, the interviews will ask more opinion-based questions about the organization's roles, goals, and future. The most crucial segment of the interviews will be a discussion about cooperation with other organizations. What is very important here are both personal and collective (opinion of the organization as a whole) views on cooperative relations. As this is the core of the research, most time will be devoted to receiving very detailed answers.

The structure of the interview guide is based on the guidelines of Hennink et al. (2004). The interview will start with an introduction, followed by open questions, then the key issues, and finally, some closing questions.

Ethical considerations

To legitimize the interviews, participants should be provided with sufficient information about the research. On this information they should be able to make a voluntary decision to participate. This research will make use of the consent form that was first used in the course Methods of Academic Research. The informed consent form can be found in appendix 2.

Recruitment of participants

Finding participants for interviews has a two-sided approach. To get a complete view of the cooperation dynamics, the opinions of both sides need to be questioned. One side concerns the Syrian diaspora organization in The Netherlands. They are the main focus of the research. To be able to check their stories and hear the opinions from their partners, interviews with the organizations the diaspora organization cooperate with, have also been conducted. This way, the research creates a complete picture of how exactly the proposed factors influence the partnerships between the organizations.

Step one in recruiting was to find suitable Syrian diaspora organizations. This was done through searching via the internet, looking for active groups of Syrians in any part of The Netherlands. After selecting several Syrian

organizations, they needed to be contacted to request an interview with someone in their organization. When contact was made, and an appointment for a meeting could be agreed upon, after which the other half of the interviews could be pursued.

Step two in recruitment was the use of the network approach (Hennink et al. 2011) with the Syrian diaspora organization(s) with whom contact was established. This network worked both ways: to recruit other Syrian diaspora organizations and to find the Dutch organizations they cooperate with. The latter is most important. The only suitable Dutch organizations for this research are those with a cooperative relation with Syrian diaspora organizations in the present or past. These could most effectively be found through the network of the Syrian organizations. By asking these Syrian organizations, with which contact is already established, connections could be made with the other half of the participants.

Data analysis scheme

To structure the data analysis of this research, the approach of Hennink et al (2011) is used. They describe a set of analytic tasks which should be performed to analyse the data acquired through in-depth interviews. The tasks are as follows:

1. Prepare transcripts
2. Anonymize data
3. Develop codes
4. Define codes in a codebook
5. Code data
6. Describe
7. Compare
8. Categorize
9. Conceptualize
10. Develop theory/recommendations

The most important step in this task list is the coding of the collected data. Coding is a tool to evaluate and organize the collected data and to better understand the meaning of this data (Clifford et al, 2010). While Hennink et al (2011) state the development of codes happens after the interviews are conducted and the transcripts are made, Clifford et al (2010) advise to develop some general codes to build upon while doing the coding itself.

Based on the literature studies, some codes are developed to give an impression of what topics are most important to the analysis. To identify these codes, the definition of Hennink et al (2011) is used: “We use the term *code* to refer to an issue, topic, idea opinion, etc., that is evident in the data.” The codes presented here are deductive codes, which means the codes were derived from literature and will be steered towards in the interview guide. Of course, the participants themselves could also raise a new code, which are inductive codes. This type of code can only be identified during and after the interview. The deductive codes for the qualitative data analysis are in this case:

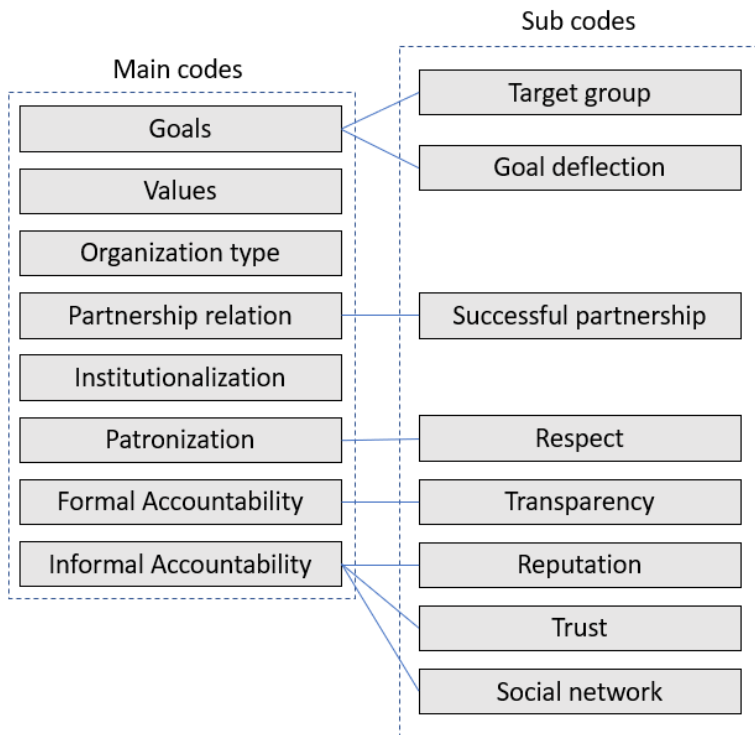


Figure 3: Deductive code scheme

Results

The results are based on seven in-depth interviews. These interviews were conducted with four Syrian diaspora organizations: Stichting Syrische Vrouwen Nederland, Het Syrisch Comité, Syrische Vrouwengroep Emmen, and the Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations Nederland (UOSSM Nederland). The other three organizations interviewed are Vluchtelingenwerk, who cooperated with Stichting Syrische Vrouwen Nederland, Amnesty Nederland, who collaborated with Het Syrisch Comité, and New Dutch Connections, who worked with Syrische Vrouwengroep Emmen. Throughout the results, quotes will be used, which are pulled from interviews conducted in Dutch. All quotes are translated to English; the original Dutch quotes are visible on request.

Raison d'être

First, it is essential to understand why the Syrian diaspora organizations exist and what the philanthropy is they are engaged in. Both Stichting Syrische Vrouwen in Nederland and Syrische Vrouwengroep Emmen say that they fill a gap in the integration in The Netherlands. Both state that the Dutch integration program is sufficient but does not give enough support for integrating fully and ultimately finding a job. The existence of these two diaspora organizations provides Syrians an extra resource for their integration into Dutch society. The other two Syrian organizations are Het Syrisch Comité and UOSSM Nederland. Both organizations are concerned with the wellbeing of Syrians in the home country. They engage in philanthropy in the form of donations, which are translated into direct medical care and humanitarian aid.

After looking at the names of these organizations and speaking with them, the target group is clear: Syrians, either in The Netherlands or in and around Syria. Surprisingly, Syrische Vrouwengroep Emmen and UOSSM Nederland stated that they have changed from their original target group and grew to be more inclusive. Syrische Vrouwengroep Emmen (2019), for example, is also open to other Arabic speaking communities like Lebanese or Egyptians. They even go as far as including Eritreans in their organization, a culture very different from the Syrian one. UOSSM Nederland (2020), originally an organization focused on providing aid in conflicted areas in Syria, also expanded their horizon by including, for example, assistance to regions in Yemen.

Partnerships

The organizations were also asked why they seek to build partnerships with other (Dutch) organizations. For the organizations concerned with integration, partnerships are essential to building bridges between Dutch and Syrian society (Stichting Syrische Vrouwen in Nederland, 2019). This means that together with the Dutch organizations, the diaspora organizations can develop more effective projects for integration and improve the situation for their diaspora in The Netherlands. For Het Syrisch Comité and UOSSM Nederland, the primary motivations are more dispersed. Het Syrisch Comité states that they cooperate with others to increase their reach. This reach is then translated into awareness about the Syrian conflict and an increase in donations for the victims in Syria. In the review of their collaborations with other organizations, all Syrian organizations were very positive about their experience. All of the partnerships that were discussed left a positive result. These results range from a successful bicycle lesson (Stichting Syrische Vrouwen Nederland, 2019), to the large total sum of €12.500,- in donations collected by the cooperation of UOSSM Nederland and several Rotary clubs (UOSSM Nederland, 2020). With all these positive stories in mind, how come all the partnerships discussed were such a real success?

Institutionalization and patronization

Now that the current activity of the Syrian diaspora organizations in The Netherlands is clear, we can investigate how these organizations behave in their partnerships and find the answer to why so many of these partnerships came out so successful. In the theoretical framework, three significant factors for a successful partnership were discussed: institutionalization & patronization, transparency, and trust. Every in-depth interview touched on these three factors, debating whether the organizations experienced these factors.

Regarding institutionalization, a very negative influence on the success of a partnership, almost all Syrian diaspora organizations said to have experienced none of it. Stichting Syrische Vrouwen in Nederland did give a reason for the existence of institutionalization and patronization in partnerships with their organizations. They said that because of the relative youth of the organization, it was hard to take them seriously. This also tied in with vaguely defined goals, which, in their view, makes it harder to perceive the diaspora organization as a serious partner. Regarding patronization, all organizations, both diaspora organization and their partners, agreed that there was no patronization:

“There was absolutely no approach like “we are going to teach you a lesson on how to do your thing”.” (Amnesty Nederland, 2019)

The one exception in the case for patronization was one partnership between Stichting Syrische Vrouwen Nederland and Vluchtelingenwerk. This case specifically left out SSVNL in the evaluation process of the project they organized together. The original project was an idea of Vluchtelingenwerk, called ‘@home’, for which SSVNL was invited to cooperate. Because the diaspora organization was left out of a part of the project, this sparked annoyance and negative feelings towards the organization of Vluchtelingenwerk. After stating their concerns and having conversations about it, the bad air got cleared, and the partnership still holds steady to this day (Stichting Syrische Vrouwen Nederland, 2019).

This situation is an excellent example of the negative effect of patronizing the ability of the diaspora organization to participate in the evaluation and how the actual involvement of them can result in a lasting partnership with successful results. Not only does it underline the effect of patronization, but it also shows the effectiveness of communicating concerns, having respect for each other, and being transparent about friction caused by the collaboration. This is a reason for the absence of patronization in the case of Syrian diaspora organizations in The Netherlands.

Formal accountability and transparency

The second factor discussed in the literature review is transparency. Surprisingly, during the interviews, this topic came up very frequently without asking. This indicates the importance in the eyes of the diaspora organizations for a transparent partnership. In the opinion of Syrian diaspora organizations, transparency takes on various forms. For Stichting Syrische Vrouwen Nederland (2019) transparency is most important when talking about organizational goals, to which Het Syrisch Comité agrees:

“Be open towards everyone; be transparent. [...] You have to be clear about what your goals are; only then can you reach them.” (Het Syrisch Comité, 2019)

Syrische Vrouwengroep Emmen, on the other hand, thinks transparency is about financials. Being clear about what your costs are, who pays for them, and how the complete financial picture looks is what transparency

means for them. What's more, Syrische Vrouwengroep Emmen also stated that because of their relatively small size and thus small financials, financial transparency is very easily achieved.

Informal accountability and trust

Compared to the two factors mentioned above, the third factor, trust, appeared to be more prevalent and multifaceted. The element of trust came up multiple times throughout multiple interviews. As discussed earlier, it was found that all partnerships that the organizations engaged in were successful. When asking the organizations, Stichting Syrische Vrouwen in Nederland, Syrische Vrouwengroep Emmen, and Amnesty Nederland mentioned trust as the most critical factor to a successful partnership. This brings up the question which is most interesting for this part of the research, where does this level of trust come from?

In the end, the answer could be similar for all organizations, diaspora organizations, and Dutch organizations alike. Still, during the in-depth interviews, several organizations proposed their different reasons for the high level of trust they share with their partner organizations. To begin, Stichting Syrische Vrouwen in Nederland (SSVNL) told about a very civil partnership with Welzijn Teylingen. They mentioned that the feeling of trust towards them comes from their openness to questions and their willingness to offer support to SSVNL. They do realize that openness does not work in one way. SSVNL underlines the importance of having an open attitude to everything and everyone who wants to help. This, they say, is rewarded by higher levels of trust.

Their partner organization Vluchtelingenwerk also states that they are delighted by the level of trust on both sides of the cooperation. In the in-depth interview with Vluchtelingenwerk, they say that because of the trust between the two organizations, Vluchtelingenwerk also receives a very trusting reaction from the Syrian community, they organize their activities in. The reason for this, according to Vluchtelingenwerk, is that SSVNL puts them in such high regard, that the Syrian community built around SSVNL is automatically more trustful towards them.

A more general reason given for high trust, by five of the seven respondents, is the composition of the organization's board. Stichting Syrische Vrouwen in Nederland, Het Syrische Comité, Amnesty Nederland, Syrische Vrouwengroep Emmen, and UOSSM Nederland point out that the presence of both Syrian and Dutch people in the board of their organization has a positive influence on trust. Several reasons why are given by respondents on why a multicultural board composition is essential. The reason SSVNL gives is best presented with the following quote:

“But in this organization, we have knowledge of both cultures. So, we can more easily make a connection between the two.” (Stichting Syrische Vrouwen in Nederland, 2019)

Syrische Vrouwengroep Emmen gives a unique insight into the function of Dutch board members in their organization. They state that the presence of such a person not only brings trust through reputation and cultural sensitivity but also increases communicative ability. This respondent talks about how their lack of knowledge of the Dutch language forms a very real barrier between them and Dutch government institutions. This can, in their opinion, lead to miscommunication between the two parties. The presence of the Dutch board member is, in their case, the perfect solution to this barrier.

Theoretical analysis

This section will compare the theoretical framework earlier in this research to the findings presented in the results. Some sides of the interviews will be more thoroughly discussed to find out whether the seven interviews support the statements made in the theoretical framework.

First, the literature review touched on trust and credibility within communities being higher than trust towards other communities (Odmalm, 2004). The significance of this statement became apparent in the interview with Vluchtelingenwerk. They confirmed that by partnering up with diaspora organizations, they had a significantly easier connection to the Syrian community, thus increasing their ability to achieve their goals.

“We are very pleased about how much trust we received from the Syrians we managed to reach through [Stichting Syrische Vrouwen Nederland]. Because it was a trusted network for them, they also trusted us, which saved us a lot of work.” (Vluchtelingenwerk, 2019)

To continue with the communities the diaspora organizations represent, Van Hear et al. (2004) concluded that diasporas are highly heterogeneous. Flanigan (2016) argued that through a collective, which are, in this case, diaspora organizations, the heterogeneity could be accounted for. While discussing this with the Syrian diaspora organizations themselves, they agreed that heterogeneity is very real. Still, the collective hardships they have endured were for them the glue that held their diaspora communities together. Three of the four organizations took it even further by welcoming other people groups into their community. One example is Syrische Vrouwengroep Emmen, which stated that they started to welcome refugees from other Arabic-speaking countries, and even people from Eritrea, a culture very different from the Syrians. What this means is that the reason for their displacement is very influential on the inclusiveness of a diaspora community.

The interviews also discussed the existence and effect of institutionalization. As presented, this did not occur in any of the cases. To explain the absence, we can look back at what Brinkerhoff (2011) stated in her article. She argues that institutionalization can happen due to the profit-generating nature of a partnership. All the cases interviewed were non-profit organizations, which means that whether an organization is pursuing profit, can also dictate whether it experiences institutionalization. However, there is one contradiction. In her article, Brinkerhoff (2011) also stated that a strong organizational identity is a remedy against institutionalization. Both Stichting Syrische Vrouwen in Nederland and Syrische Vrouwengroep Emmen state that because of the relative youth of their organization, they did not have clearly articulated goals and values.

“To be honest, it was difficult to take us seriously in the beginning; we were young. What is this organization, what do they want exactly, that was not quite clear.” (Stichting Syrische Vrouwen in Nederland, 2019)

This is precisely what Brinkerhoff (2011) said is essential to having a strong organizational identity. This could mean that the non-profit ways of an organization weigh heavier on institutionalization compared to the organizational identity.

When speaking about formal accountability, all four diaspora organizations agree that this transparency is key to working together with other organizations and give it as their recommendations to future partnerships as well. Looking back at the suggestion put forward by Cullen et al. (2000) about gradually revealing goals and

financials, the diaspora organizations could not agree less. In their opinion, complete transparency about goals, actions, and financials is vital for a successful partnership.

While discussing informal accountability with the respondents, they talked a lot about their board composition. The quote that Stichting Syrische Vrouwen in Nederland gives about the Dutch people in their board corresponds very well with the suggestion to be cross-cultural competent when engaging in partnerships between a diaspora organization and another organization (Cullen et al., 2000; Pucik, 1988). UOSSM (2020) gives another reason why a multicultural board increases trust. They say that the reputation, something that influences informal accountability, of their Dutch board members attracted a lot of potential parties interested in collaboration. They understand that these Dutch board members have high esteem in their communities and bring vast social networks to their organizations. In their opinion, this meant that other people from Dutch communities are more trusting towards UOSSM Nederland when thinking about a partnership.

New insights

Next to the discussion about the factors found in the literature studies, the respondents put forward other factors on successful partnerships. Het Syrisch Comité (2019) spoke about the political alignment of other organizations and how this could block possible partnerships. In their case, an organization that aligns themselves with the Syrian regime could never be a partner for them. While this is not very likely to be the case, Amnesty Nederland (2019) stated a more realistic view of this. This quote best describes their perspective:

“Then, the question came for a more intensive partnership. Well, on the one hand, I had to decline. [...] On the other hand, there was always a common thread because Amnesty wants to keep strict neutrality. Our standpoint towards Assad’s regime is very different compared to that of Het Syrisch Comité” (Amnesty Nederland, 2019)

Their organization maintains strict neutrality to the Syrian conflict. What this means is that it forms a barrier for them when a (possible) partner organization is aligned with one of the many sides of the conflict. In their case specifically, they blocked more intensive cooperation because the partner organization was aligning themselves with one side of the conflict.

Another new aspect of a successful partnership was brought up by Syrische Vrouwengroep Emmen. They spoke about the personal attributes of the Syrian people and how they behave in organizations and collaboration. The situation is best described by the following quote from Syrische Vrouwengroep Emmen:

“Syrians are all stubborn because we were a closed country by politics, image, geography, and history. We are not all open-minded towards others.” (Syrische Vrouwengroep Emmen, 2019)

What this means, is that the nature of Syrian people is not geared towards cooperation and having an open attitude toward other cultures or ideas. This means that for a Syrian, it could be harder to start up an organization by oneself and engage in successful partnerships. Being aware of this fact and actively doing something about this possible personal disadvantage could have a direct positive impact on a successful partnership.

Conclusions

To conclude the research and summarize the results and discussion, the main research question is answered:

“How can Syrian diaspora organizations build successful partnerships with Dutch organizations to achieve their goals?”

The answer to this is an arrangement of multiple factors brought together by literature and in-depth interviews. On the one hand, the prevention of institutionalization and patronization are beneficial for partnerships. The negative impact of institutionalization can be mitigated by keeping a robust organizational identity or be entirely mitigated by keeping to a non-profit oriented organization. Patronization decreases when both organizations communicate about misunderstandings, be respectful to each other, and being transparent about the activities within a partnered project.

On the other hand, there are factors positively influencing these partnerships. One is formal accountability, being supported by complete transparency of activities and financials. The other is informal accountability, which is supported by trust, reputation, and social networks. On top of those main factors, two new factors were proposed: political alignment and cultural characteristics. Keeping a politically neutral identity for an organization increases their chances for a partnership, while political differences are challenging to coordinate together. Lastly, the Syrian cultural characteristics, especially in another country, create an extra barrier to overcome when building an organization or a partnership.

Research reflection

Looking back at the entire research, some aspects caused some difficulties, starting with the literature. The conflict in Syria is relatively recent, which means the organizations set up by the refugees from that conflict are very young. Because of the short existence of Syrian diaspora organizations, academic literature about this specific topic is very limited. While this is not an immediate problem, it is important to be aware that other research on diaspora organizations in general, or specific non-Syrian diaspora organizations can only be partly applied to the Syrian case. While similarities are always to be found, it is essential to keep in mind that cultural differences influence what is described as necessary for partnerships.

Another point of attention is with the interviews. First, all the interviews were conducted in Dutch. While this is not the mother tongue for any of the respondents from the Syrian diaspora organizations, the interviews kept to Dutch, based on their preference. While two were very fluent in Dutch, the interviews with Syrische Vrouwengroep Emmen and UOSSM Nederland brought with them a language barrier. In retrospect, the reactions gave the impression that the questions were well understood, but while analyzing the results, it was still essential to be cautious about interpreting answers.

The second and last point of reflection is a possible reluctance to answer some questions. What this means is that some questions during the interview were about ongoing partnerships. At the beginning of the interview, it was stated that all comments are private, and no names will be used in the final report. But still, it could be possible that there was a reluctance to talk openly about the wrongs in a partnership. While I believe that all answers are genuine and honest, it was essential to keep this in mind.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide Syrian diaspora organizations and Dutch organizations.

After everything is settled and the interview is about to begin, it is first important to ask the respondent if they agree to being recorded during the interview. It is necessary to point out that the recording will only be used to document the conversation and will not be published. This also includes the consent of the respondent in participating in the interview. After the respondent has signed the consent form for the interview, it can begin.

The interview starts by explaining what it will touch upon. After this is clear, the next step is to shape a picture of the organization by asking some introductory questions:

- “Can you tell me who you are, what your background is, and what your role is in this organization?”
- “What is the organization (name, location, size, typology) you are working for and how did it originate?”

After this is all clear, it is time to move on to finding out what the goals and values of this organization are. This way, it could be possible to frame the organization in one of the types of development they are pursuing. The opening questions will be:

- “How does your organization relate to the Syrian diaspora?”
- “What is it trying to accomplish and how are you doing that?”
- “What are the main principles you follow as an organization?”
- “How is the work of your organization received by those you target?”
- “How do you see the future of your organization? Do you aspire to expand your philanthropy to other countries or even Syria?”

The last question especially creates a good image of the future goals and movement through the development types.

The most important part of the interview is getting to know the cooperative relations of the organization with other organizations. This part tries to find out what these relations look like, how they function, and most importantly, how it could be improved in their point of view. This part will ask the key questions, with the aim to answer the main research question:

- “With which other organizations does your organization cooperate with?”
- “What do these relations look like?”
 - “What are the roles of both sides in organizing together?”
 - “Can you give some examples of projects you organized together?”
 - “Who took the lead and how willing were the people involved to cooperate?”
 - “Who was accountable in those projects?”
 - “What did the finances look like?”
 - “What is the organization’s opinion about this cooperation?”
 - “What is your personal opinion about this cooperation?”
- “How would you improve future cooperation with the same organization?”
 - “Were there any negative aspects?”
 - “Were there any cultural issues present?”
 - “How do you think you can maintain your goals and values while cooperating?”
 - “How would you ensure that your organization will not become a tool of another organization?”

Finally, to come to an end of the interview, some closing questions will be asked:

- “What is your next project and with whom are you, as an organization, going to cooperate?”

- “What advice would you give to starting Syrian diaspora organizations?”
- “What do you think is the future of the Syrian diaspora in general and what do you think your role should be in that future?”

The interview will be completed after this, stopping the recording and thanking the respondent. Agreements could be made for future feedback on the interview or sharing the results of the research.

Appendix 2: Informed consent form

(name participant)

.....

hereby consents to be a participant in the current research performed by

(name researcher)

.....

I have agreed to take part in the study entitled Cooperation between Syrian diaspora organizations and Dutch organizations, and I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. I have the option to withdraw from this study at any time, without penalty, and I also have the right to request that my responses will not be used.

The following points have been explained to me:

1. The goal of this study is

.....

2. Participation in this study should help advance our understanding of

.....

3. I shall be asked to

.....

5. My responses will be treated confidentially, and my anonymity will be ensured. Hence, my responses cannot be identifiable and linked back to me as an individual.

6. The researcher will answer any questions I might have regarding this research, now or later in the course of the study.

Date:

Signature researcher:

Date:

Signature participant: